

Washington's Natural Areas



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands



White Salmon Oak
Natural Resources Conservation
Area (NRCA) in Klickitat County
provides a glimpse of the region's
presettlement landscape. It contains
representatives of Oregon white oak
communities that are quickly
disappearing from Washington.

Protecting Our Natural Heritage



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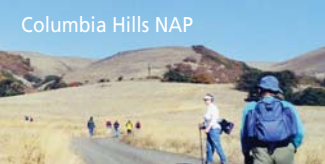
Washington is one of the most ecologically diverse states in the nation. Its landscapes and ecosystems are shaped by dramatic differences in climate and topography.

This has created the conditions that foster the cool, wet forests of the west half of the state and the vast stretches of arid shrub-steppe of the east. | During the dramatic population influx of the past century, much of Washington's landscape was altered to make way for farms, industry, cities and towns; native ecosystems were changed or eliminated in the process. Many

Washingtonians became concerned that we were losing much of our state's unique natural

environment. | Recognizing the need to protect our natural heritage, the Legislature passed the 1972 Natural Area Preserves Act, established the Washington Natural Heritage Program, and passed the 1987 Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act. Each plays an important role. The Natural Heritage Program provides the systematic approach to protection, cataloging and prioritizing species and ecosystems. The natural areas (preserves and conservation areas) protect these valuable natural features on specific sites. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages many of these conservation lands through the Natural Areas Program. | In addition to protecting rare and threatened species and communities, natural areas also protect high quality examples of more common native ecosystems. These representative examples contribute to conservation and they serve as baseline reference sites to guide the management and restoration of less pristine areas.

Cypress Island is the largest relatively undeveloped island in the San Juan Islands group. Both a natural area preserve and a natural resources conservation area are designated on the island.



Shumocher Creek NAP in Mason County is home to the Sitka alder/ skunk cabbage/ water parsley community, a critically imperiled plant community. It has a very restricted geographic range, and is only found in the Puget lowlands.

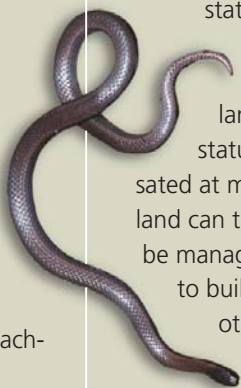
Natural Area Preserves (NAP)

The Natural Area Preserves Act was enacted in 1972 by the Legislature "to secure for the people of present and future generations the benefit of an enduring resource of natural areas by establishing a system of natural area preserves, and to provide for the protection of these natural areas."

Natural area preserves (NAPs) provide the highest level of protection for the highest quality native ecosystems and rare plant and animal species. Valued for teaching and scientific research, NAPs provide a relatively undisturbed setting in which to study native ecosystems and species. Many research projects on NAPs are ongoing statewide.

Native forests and grasslands, bogs, and sagebrush communities are protected on NAPs. Examples of other protected resources include habitats for rare plant and animal species, such as the basalt daisy, the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, and the Oregon spotted frog.

Above Center: Little is known about the sharptail snake in Washington. It is at risk due to its limited geographic range and the small number of known populations.



Natural area preserves are acquired through gifts, land exchanges, or purchase from willing sellers, with funding provided primarily through state and federal grants.

Some NAPs are former trust lands. When trust lands are purchased for NAP status, the trusts are compensated at market value. Replacement land can then be acquired that will be managed to provide revenue to build public schools and other institutions.

Some NAPs have walking trails and interpretive signs explaining their unique natural features, but access is limited to scientific and educational uses on sites where critical sensitive features are at risk.

► Hydrologic research at Kings Lake Bog NAP in King County not only helps train tomorrow's scientists, but also provides valuable information regarding how bog systems function.



Selah Cliffs NAP in Yakima County supports the largest known population of the basalt daisy, a rare plant that only grows in a ten-mile stretch of the Yakima River canyon and immediate vicinity.

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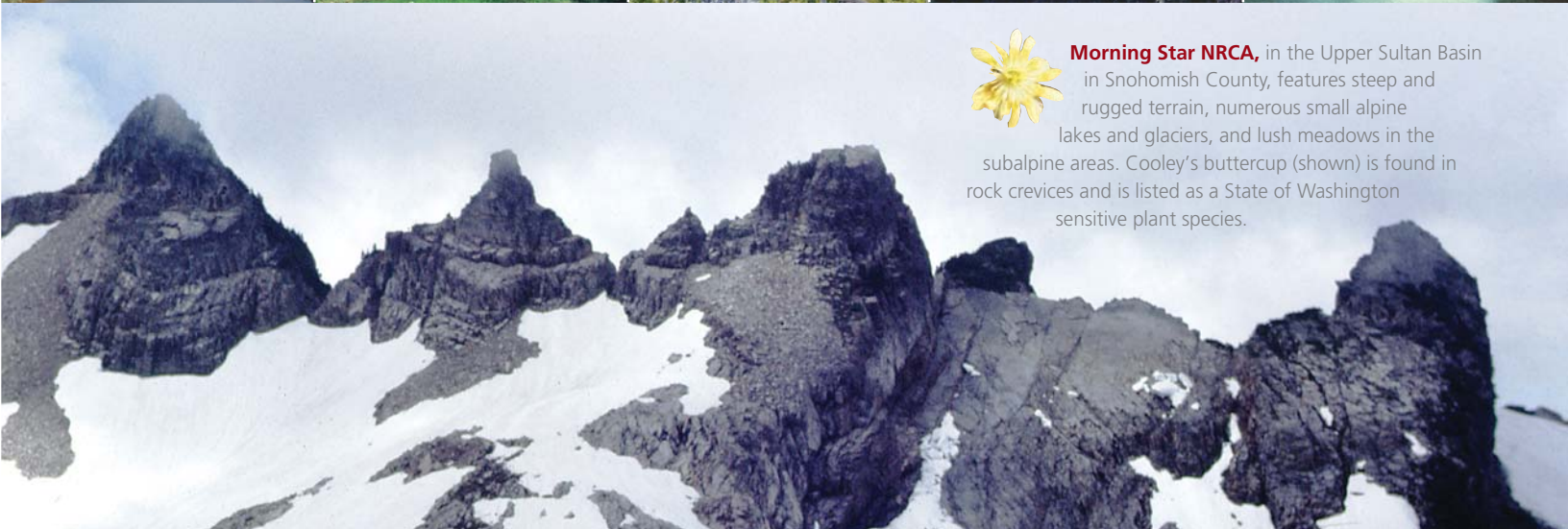
Elk River NRCA

Dishman Hills NRCA

Loomis NRCA

Mount Si NRCA

Woodard Bay NRCA



Morning Star NRCA, in the Upper Sultan Basin in Snohomish County, features steep and rugged terrain, numerous small alpine lakes and glaciers, and lush meadows in the subalpine areas. Cooley's buttercup (shown) is found in rock crevices and is listed as a State of Washington sensitive plant species.

Natural Resources Conservation Areas (NRCA)

In 1987, the Legislature created natural resources conservation areas (NRCAs), another category of land designation to protect special areas of statewide significance. NRCAs are established for their outstanding scenic and ecological values, and to provide opportunities for education and low-impact public use, where appropriate.

Special features found in existing conservation areas include coastal rain forests, salt marshes, ponderosa pine forests, active nesting sites for bald eagles and peregrine falcons, Canada lynx habitat, and significant scenic and geological features.

Many NRCAs serve as outdoor classrooms, with areas for group use and trails for hiking and wildlife viewing.

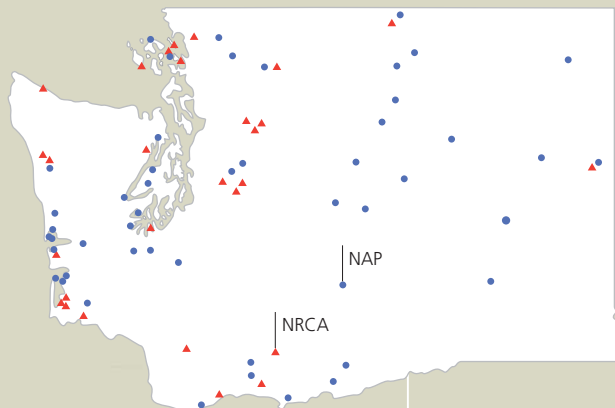
As with NAPs, conservation areas are acquired through gifts, land exchanges, or purchases from willing sellers. Most of the current sites were originally state school trust lands that were identified for their special attributes and purchased with funds appropriated by the Legislature.



Peregrines Return to Mount Si

The discovery of a nesting pair of peregrine falcons and their young on Mount Si shows that natural areas make a difference. The falcons returned to this King County site after an absence of several decades. Mount Si was one of the state's first NRCAs.

► Western gray squirrel is on the state's list of threatened species.



SITES DATA AS OF JANUARY 2004

DNR manages 77 NAPs and NRCAs, protecting and conserving 115,000 acres of Washington's natural heritage.

“Our natural heritage is a precious resource that must be protected for future generations to enjoy. I am proud to maintain this legacy of scenic landscapes, native ecosystems, and significant natural features on behalf of the people of Washington.”

Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands



Only four populations of the Oregon spotted frog are known to exist in Washington. One of the most viable is in the Trout Lake NAP in Klickitat County. More than 90 percent of the frog's historic habitat is gone, due mainly to loss of wetlands statewide.

Natural Heritage Program

The Washington Natural Heritage Program was established in 1977 as a joint venture between The Nature Conservancy and five state agencies. In 1981, the Legislature amended the Natural Area Preserves Act, placing the Natural Heritage Program within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Natural Heritage Program serves Washington's citizens as a comprehensive source of information on our state's mosaic of ecosystems, plants and animals. Natural Heritage scientists compile information about the status and location of these important natural resources in a comprehensive database. This information is available to public agencies, private landowners, conservation organizations, industry, educators, and consultants to support a variety of land management decisions.

The Natural Heritage Program identifies lands that are suitable to include in the natural areas system, and the Natural Heritage Advisory Council approves recommendations for acquisition. The Commissioner of Public Lands appoints the council. Its 15 members include scientists, representatives from agriculture, forestry, other agencies and citizens-at-large.

The council advises the Commissioner and the Natural Areas Program in the identification of sites worthy of protection and in critical management strategies. The particular expertise of each council member is drawn upon to provide key information for specific site management decisions.

The Natural Heritage Program prepares the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, which reviews the status of natural areas statewide, and identifies priorities for continued conservation efforts.



The Natural Heritage Program serves as a comprehensive source of information on our state's mosaic of ecosystems, plants and animals.

Above Right: Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow, an endangered plant, is found at Camas Meadows NAP, Chelan County.

Left: The great Mormon fritillary butterfly is likely to be seen on many NAPs and NRCAs.

Below: Water quality monitoring at Woodard Bay NRCA, Thurston County.



Managing the Sites

Stewardship and Volunteers

Volunteers work hand-in-hand with natural areas managers and ecologists to ensure protection of Washington's plant and animal populations on natural areas statewide.



Become a Volunteer

For information on how you can volunteer, contact the Natural Areas Program in Olympia. Please see our website for photos and descriptions of the sites.

Natural Areas Program
Washington Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 47014
Olympia, WA 98504-7014
(360) 902-1600
www.dnr.wa.gov/nap

Persons needing this information
in an alternative format, call
(360) 902-1600 or
TTY (360) 902-1125



Volunteer and stewardship opportunities abound on natural areas.

Left to right: Training natural area volunteer stewards.
Restoration at Rocky Prairie NAP in Thurston County. Annual
volunteer clean-up day at Dabob Bay NAP, Jefferson County.

Stewardship

Once acquired, some sites must be actively managed to retain the unique and irreplaceable features for which they were designated. Without active management, the rare species and habitats within the natural areas could be lost.

Ecologists and natural areas managers work to protect habitat and encourage the health and continued viability of Washington's natural heritage.

Weed control is an ongoing priority, requiring seasonal monitoring for new and recurring invasions. Invasive weeds that threaten natural areas include Scot's broom on the prairies, spartina (cord grass) in coastal areas, and knapweeds in eastern Washington.

Golden paintbrush is a federally threatened species protected on a natural area preserve.



Volunteers

Natural areas managers work with a cadre of site stewards and other volunteers statewide. With site management plans for guidance, volunteers pull and cut weeds, and plant and monitor native species. Scientists and stewards visit preserves and conservation areas throughout the year to document changes in the plant and animal populations and surrounding environments, and to plan restoration activities where they are needed.

Natural areas offer many opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in conservation and nature study, while making an invaluable contribution to our natural heritage.

